



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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**Testimony on HB 5322: An Act Concerning the Creation of a Human Services Permit
and a Requirement That School Social Workers Conduct Home Visits During the School
Year**

Education Committee

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Submitted by: Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing nearly 2,400 members we strongly oppose HB 5322. This bill allows the State Department of Education to create a permit program for certain baccalaureate degreed individuals to perform mental health functions in public schools and mandates home visits by school social workers

The pandemic has brought on an urgent need for more mental health providers to work within schools. The acuity of the mental health needs of students requires the specialized training that only a graduate or doctoral degree in a behavioral health field can provide. Even then current school mental health professionals struggle with the level of needs being exhibited by students. To allow baccalaureate degreed individuals to provide mental health services with students carries the serious risk of doing more harm than good. Plus, such baccalaureate trained persons would require close supervision by a graduate degree mental health professional in the school, taking time away that the supervisor would otherwise have to perform their current roles. We understand the need for more mental health providers in schools, but this is not the answer. Rather than expend funds by SDE to administer the permit program, better to apply those funds toward the hiring of more qualified mental health providers, such as school social workers that require a master degree in social work.

Section 2 of the bill would require school social workers to make at least 2 home visits per school year to each student they work with. Frankly, this makes no practice sense and shows a complete lack of understanding of the environment and the work of school social workers. Home visits are performed by school social workers when appropriate and necessary, however an arbitrary 2 visits per school year is not in the best interests of the student, school social worker or the school for the following reasons:

- Home visits are very time consuming and only necessary in limited situations.
- In regional schools home visits can require considerable travel distance and time.

- School social workers are constantly dealing with crisis in the school that require them to be in the building.
- For safety reasons many schools require two staff members for home visits, thus removing two employees from the school.
- Home visits are intrusive so should only be done when absolutely needed.
- Parents working outside of the home most likely would need to take time off from work to be present.
- Not every student has a need for or would benefit from a home visit. Each student's needs are individualized by the school social worker and each student's care is based on the student's individual needs. Mandatory home visits remove the professional judgement of the school social worker.
- Even if such a mandate were to pass there is not enough time in the school day for school social workers to implement such a requirement.
- School social workers have incredibly difficult and busy school days. A mandated home visit schedule will only serve to encourage school social workers to find other employment settings.

NASW/CT strongly urges the Education Committee to let HB 5322 die in committee.